

5. WHITE-TAILED MOLE *TALPA MICRURA LEUCURA* BLYTH IN ASSAM - SOME NEW RECORDS

The White-tailed Mole *Talpa micrura leucura* Blyth, 1850, was recorded as a hill-dwelling species from Khasi Hills of Meghalaya and Naga Hills (now Nagaland) (Ellerman & Morrison-Scott, 1951; Prater, 1980).

On 2nd January, 1993, while on a field trip to Phillobari RF (27° 31' N, 95° 42' E) in Tinsukia district, I came across a live mole on the middle of the forest road, at c 1400 hrs. It was trying to hide itself under a large leaf.

On closer examination, I saw a small white-tail which enabled me to identify it specifically as well as sub-specifically. It measured c. 10 cm of head and body length. After photographing it I set it free.

The sighting was significant as it is the first record of the species from Assam (earlier reference

of Assam implied Meghalaya and Nagaland), a new locality record, and also the first one from the flat plains. Phillobari is in the upper Brahmaputra Plains having an elevation of only 139 m above msl. The known altitude where the species as a whole is found is from 1525 m to 2440 m.

The local people often kill the species for medicinal purpose. Locally it is called *Uk-muk*.

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6. RED PANDA *AILURUS FULGENS* F. CUVIER IN THE NORTH-EAST WITH AN IMPORTANT RECORD FROM GARO HILLS

(With one map)

The Red or Lesser Panda *Ailurus fulgens* F. Cuvier is distributed from Nepal to northern Myanmar and southern China (Ellerman & Morrison-Scott 1951, Prater 1980). However, there is no specific mention of Bhutan, North Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh in these important works. Gee (1964), however, stated that it occurs in Bhutan and north-western corner of Arunachal Pradesh.

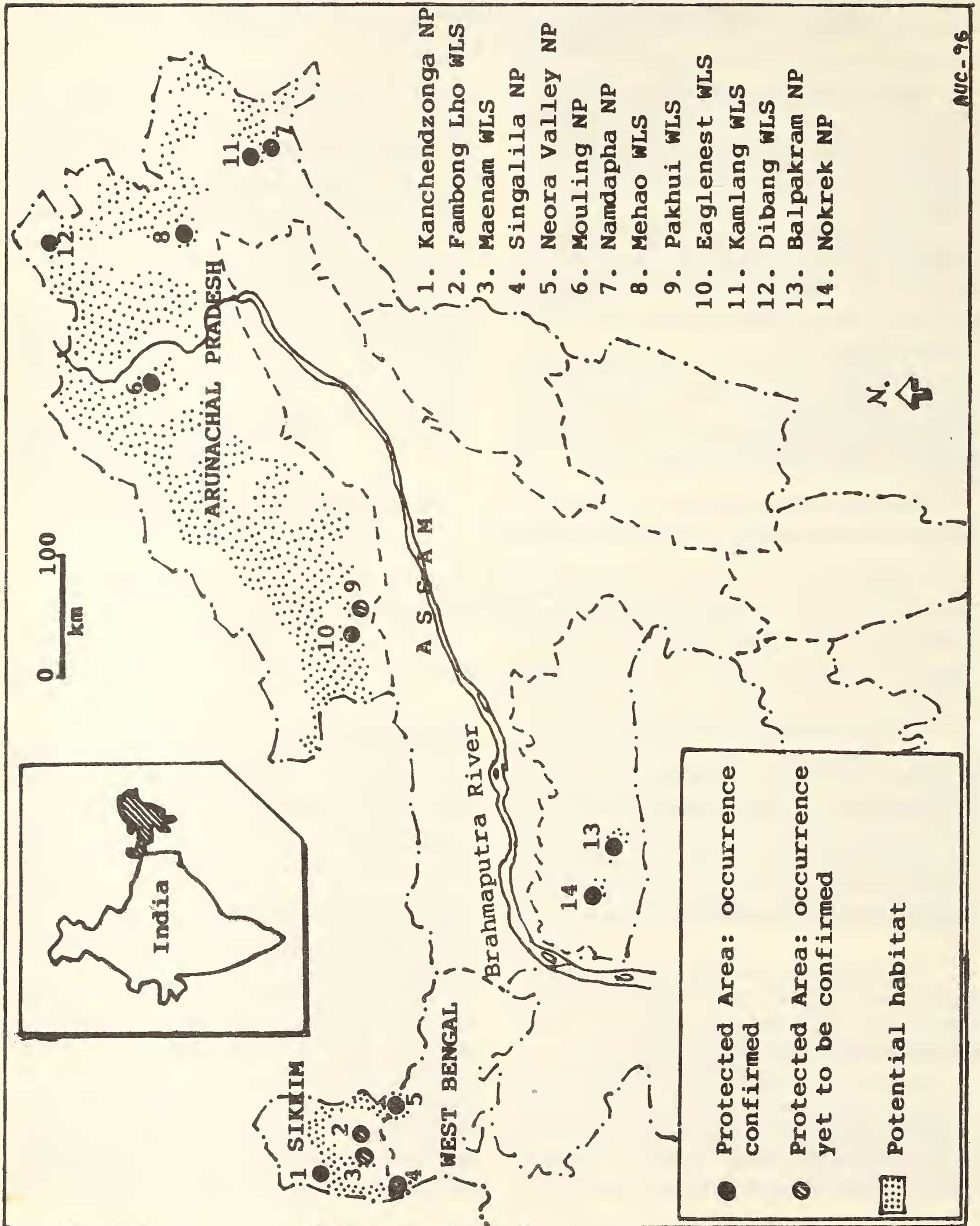
The red panda is an animal of higher elevation, usually above 1500 m (Prater 1980), in temperate forests with bamboo. Roberts and Gittleman (1984) mentioned that it occurs above 2200 m.

Between 1990 and 1995, I was able to carry out field surveys in some potential habitats of the red panda in north-eastern India as part of a broader survey of wildlife in general. As well as travelling widely in Assam, I visited Arunachal Pradesh, North

Bengal and Meghalaya.

In India, the red panda is confined to the north-east, i.e., along the middle and lesser Himalaya and Mishmi Hills covering parts of Sikkim, Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Tawang, West Kameng, East Kameng, Upper Subansiri, Upper Siang, West Siang, East Siang, Dibang Valley, Lohit and Changlang districts, all in Arunachal Pradesh. The protected areas having the panda are listed in table 1 and the distribution in Figure 1.

However, the most startling find was its record from Garo Hills area of Meghalaya. Occurrence of red panda in the area was considered a rumour although the Forest department brochure on Balpakram contains its name. The main reason for disbelief was that Garo Hills are located far away from the red panda's known range, and a significant barrier in the form of the Brahmaputra valley exists



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Fig. 1. Distribution of the Red panda in Northeastern India

TABLE 1
PROTECTED AREAS IN INDIA WITH KNOWN AND
POSSIBLE RED PANDA POPULATIONS. THOSE
MARKED WITH * ARE POSSIBLE AREAS

Protected Area	State	Area in sq km
Kanchendzonga NP	Sikkim	849.5
*Fambong Lho WLS	"	51.6
* Maenam WLS	"	35.3
Singalila NP	West Bengal	78.6
Neora Valley NP	"	86.9
Mouling NP	Arunachal Pradesh	483.0
Namdapha NP	"	1985.0
Mehao WLS	"	281.5
*Pakhui WLS	"	862.0
Eaglenest WLS	"	217.0
Kamlang WLS	"	783.0
Dibang WLS	"	4149.0
Balpakram NP	Meghalaya	312.0
Nokrek NP	"	47.5

NP= National Park; WLS= Wildlife Sanctuary.

between Garo Hills and the Himalaya. Moreover, no high elevation area with sub-tropical vegetation occurs in the area (which is basically a low rugged plateau with hot tropical climate).

On 10th October, 1995, on getting a report from an experienced Forest official (J. Datta, DFO, pers. comm.), I visited a locality in Tura town, and to my surprise found a skin in excellent condition. I examined and photographed it. It was reportedly shot by one Dr Lau sometime in the early sixties from Nokrek area of Garo Hills. It was high up in a tree when the hunter shot it mistaking it for a Giant squirrel *Ratufa bicolor*. One more skin, now damaged, was also reported, which was from Chutmang area of Balpakram, and was collected in 1982. Two more skins were reported from different

parts of Garo Hills during the past few years (P. Marak, DFO, pers. comm).

From the skins and discussion with officials, it appears that the red panda is confined to the higher areas of Balpakram and Nokrek National Parks. The highest point of Balpakram is Chutmang, only 1023 m above msl while Nokrek, the highest peak of Garo Hills is 1412 m high. District wise, Balpakram is in South Garo Hills, while Nokrek is in East and West Garo Hills.

The occurrence of the red panda in Garo Hills has established many new records: (i) this is the lowest elevation in the entire range of the species; (ii) also the first record of the species from tropical forest; and (iii) the specimen measured: Head and body length= 73 cm, Tail length= 43 cm; this is the largest known specimen (skin) in the world. The previous maximum recorded length was 62.5 cm for head and body and 50 cm for tail (Prater 1980, MacDonald, ed, 1984).

Locally, the red panda is called *Aaye-michinji* by the Idu Mishmis of Dibang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh and *Matchibel* by the Garos of Meghalaya.

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